

Valley Angler

A New Hampshire Anglers' Must Read

by Bill Thompson

Recently I was made aware of a book on New Hampshire fishing that I was not previously familiar with. I had heard of a companion book by the same author, but not until a customer asked about the books had I taken the time to seek them out. Thankfully Janet "Googled" the author and order a few for the shop. The books are: Fishing in New Hampshire A History and The Bassing of New Hampshire, How Black Bass Came to the Granite State by Jack Noon. If you are a New Hampshire angler both of these books should be on your book shelf.

Both of these books could easily share the sub title of: "How Greed and Messing With the Environment, Without a Clue, Will Screw Up Paradise". Mr. Noon goes into great detail about the abundance of fish that was found by the early visitors to New Hampshire. It must have been an awe-inspiring sight to have witnessed. Unfortunately it did not take long for the new comers to put an end to it.

The early explorers wrote of the enormous schools of salmon that ascended the costal rivers of New England. In addition to the salmon other anadromous fish such as the Atlantic Sturgeon, Shad, Alewives, Lampreys and Blueback Herring also inhabited the costal rivers. Stripers, Bluefish and Cod along with other salt water fish were found along the coast. Many New Hampshire rivers are named for these fish that once swam their waters. The Salmon Falls River, Lamprey and Sturgeon Creek which flow into the Piscataqua are typical.

Some of the very first Europeans to arrive came just for the fishing. Fishing camps were set up on the Isles Of Shoals and at the mouth of the Piscataqua long before permanent settlements were established. The Native Americans and these first European fishermen probably had little or no effect on the fish populations, however once the first settlements took hold it spelled the end for them.

Sea run brook trout could also be found, however it was the inland lakes and streams where this char reigned supreme. In addition to the brookie New Hampshire inland lakes and streams had Lake Trout and landlocked Salmon. Saw mills and grist mills were a staple for any town and vital for its survival. As soon as dams were built to supply water power for these mills the anadromous fish were doomed. The ancient spawning grounds were now blocked and choked with sawdust. The first settlers' dams were only the first salvo when the American Industrial Revolution got into full swing and the larger dams built on the Merrimac and Connecticut it was all over.

The poor brook trout fared no better. The beaver, because of its valuable fur, was hunted almost to extinction. With the demise of the beaver the beaver bogs began to disappear

which in turn meant the end to prime habitat for the trout. Throw in over harvesting and lots of careless logging and you have a recipe for disaster.

However the worst was yet to come. As the trout began to disappear people began to replace them with other species. As a result we now have dozens of non-native species in our waters. Now, depending on how you look at it this could be a good thing or it could be a bad thing. Rainbow trout, brown trout and bass are all non-natives. The introduction of these non-native trout and attempts to replace disappearing Brook Trout with new strains of Brook Trout makes it highly doubtful that there is a true native left within the state. The native Lake Trout suffered as well. As for the landlocked Salmon it was so well thought of that it was introduced into numerous lakes where it was never found and thus became an invasive specie as well. Needless to say the Salmon never did well in these new waters.

The one thing you can say about mankind is that once an bad idea takes hold we will continue to work at it until we have pretty much destroyed everything. From 1867 to 1938 14 different fish have been stocked in Lake Sunapee by the state. An additional 7 species have been added by individual do gooders. As a result the Sunapee Golden Trout. An unique char found only in New Hampshire was brought to extinction.

With all this history behind us you would think that by now we would have learned from our mistakes. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Today we continue the practice of stocking fish that in many ways is a detriment to the water we are trying to improve. Much of this stocking is carried out by individuals working alone or in small groups. These fellows are convinced that they are doing everyone a favor by stocking bass, perch or hornpout in lakes or ponds where they are not found. This practice, although against the law, is popular not just in New Hampshire but all across the country.

I would also suggest that a lot of the stocking done legally by our own Fish and game Departments is done with little regard for what is the right thing for a body of water. The blame for this does not rest entirely on the shoulders of the Fish and Game Department, but on us the fishermen of the state. It our constant demand for large fish that pressures the Department to provide them. As a result larger fish are stocked in streams that are not large enough to support them. These large fish demand a greater proportion of the food supply normally found in these small streams. Smaller fish that may have spawned naturally in this same stream are most likely to become a food source for these larger artificially introduced fish. As Pogo was found of saying, "We have met the enemy and he is us". It is a vicious circle and it will never end until we are ready to make a commitment to wild trout. If you would like a better understanding of fishing in our beautiful state I would certainly recommend reading one or both of these books.

See you on the river.